

## The Revolutionary Internationalist League On Workers Power

### RIL on Workers Power in 1995

*“This position has got the LRCI leadership into a series of hopeless tangles and convoluted arguments, as their positions have zigzagged in response to the shifting circumstances of the Bosnian war. One general feature has become steadily more pronounced however, the adaptation to the feeling among sections of liberal western opinion that ‘our’ governments must ‘do something’ – a sentiment that plays directly into the hands of imperialism. So now we have the ludicrous position of the LRCI trying to sound revolutionary, and calling for the UN and NATO out of the Balkans and condemning the bombing, while at the same time demanding that ‘our’ government sends arms to the Bosnian forces and opens the borders to (Islamic) ‘volunteers’ going to fight with them. In other words Workers Power does not want the imperialists to fight in the Balkans; they just want them to get their clients and proxies to do the fighting! No wonder that this reactionary nonsense has blown the LRCI apart and exposed it as an unprincipled bloc.”*

That is exactly what they did/do in Libya and Syria today! This document could be published by us but it would need a long introduction to clarify the differences on the questions of the Anti Imperialist United Front and Special Oppression. But it has very valuable insights on the politics of Workers Power and the RCIT today. This document was written by Nick De Marco, now a rich Barrister who has abandoned all revolutionary politics. He defends rich FA clubs against players compensation claims and is/was a director of Queens Park Rangers. But in 1995 he wrote well, even if the seeds of the later degeneration of that group are apparent in some of the political positions. I will CC it to the South African group.

Gerry Downing 2011.

### Introduction: Who are Workers Power?

Workers Power in Britain is one of the many ‘left’ organisations that likes to call itself Trotskyist (Revolutionary Marxist). On paper, they like to appear as the ‘purest’ of Marxist, but like so much of the rest of Britain’s left they have gone through a steady process of political degeneration and opportunist adaptation. Increasingly they have become just another irrelevant sect, more interested in selling their paper than building any real struggles that can forge a new revolutionary vanguard and party. They have built up an ‘international’ in much the same way as British groups like Militant, and their own former ancestors, the SWP: instead of developing a genuine democratic internationalist party, they have set up ‘satellite’ sections who must follow the line of the British leaders. They call this the ‘League for a Revolutionary Communist International’ (LRCI), but as we shall see in this document the LRCI is no more than the extension of Workers Power in Britain.

Since our organisation, the Revolutionary Internationalist League (RIL) and internationally the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC), was formed in the early 1980s we have had many debates and differences with Workers Power. In our history there have even been suggestions that our organisations fuse as we have both been traditionally more on the ‘left’ than most of Britain’s centrist groups that describe themselves as Trotskyist.[1] The differences we have had with Workers Power have often seemed academic to outsiders, as if we were arguing about unimportant secondary questions, when really we were ‘all on the same side’. But we have always maintained that behind even the smallest of differences lies a difference in method which is fundamental to building a successful international revolutionary party.

Over the past few years and in particular since the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s Workers Power has rapidly speeded up its process of political degeneration and decay. It has come out with more and more rotten positions, it has developed an undemocratic and unhealthy internal regime and it has made a complete mess of just about every

major area of practical work it has engaged in. Today, Workers Power holds out no hope of winning militant workers and youth to its organisation, it has become part of the British left's living dead. How was it that an organisation with so many correct revolutionary positions could become such an unhealthy waste of space? Unfortunately, the story is all too familiar; the biggest danger for revolutionary organisations in the world today is their own political degeneration as a product of the defeats of workers' struggles since the 1970s.

It should be important to anyone who wants to make a revolution to study this process of degeneration and decay, to learn the hard lessons necessary to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated in the future. That's why we direct this pamphlet not just at those members or ex-members of Workers Power, but to anyone serious about building a movement that can smash capitalism and oppression in Britain and throughout the world.

Workers Power's rapid degeneration has led to a series of splits within their international movement and the British section. Three important splits have occurred this year, the most recent being the most important - the complete break of all the Latin American comrades from Workers Power - the split of the Peruvian section. Poder Obrero (PO) and the Bolivian section also called Poder Obrero, late in September, as well as that of the 'Proletarian Faction' of the Workers Power New Zealand group in early September. In this pamphlet we hope to give an account of some of the differences that led to the splits as many show signs of the rotteness of Workers Power's method. But this won't be a commentary on someone else's divorce but a drawing out of the real problems of political degeneration that we have seen and struggled against in Workers Power for years.

We will outline what these differences mean in practice, from the anti-racist struggles in Britain to the implications of Workers Power's counter revolutionary positions on eastern Euro; We will spell out what Trotskyists would do in these areas, and what our small organisation has been able to achieve compared to Workers Power.

Worker's Power's Centrist Method In essence Workers Power's centrist method can be reduced to a sectarianism towards the working class and youth, which characterises its passive propagandistic arrogant and literalist approach to class struggle and an opportunism to the various 'left' misleaders of the class; centrist groups like Militant and the SWP and 'community leaders' etc. In their practical work this is shown in their endless attempts to achieve joint conferences of centrists instead developing action to fight racism for instance.

Whilst Workers Power often zigzag between this sectarian and opportunist moods both to the workingclass and centrist left reformist leaders we will show how in theory and practice Workers Power's method contains this major weakness. Along with this Workers Power displays a centrist attitude to the transitional programme, the method of Trotskyism. Whilst churning out lists and action programmes chock-a block with fancy transitional demands for struggles throughout the world when it comes to practice they desert the transitional method altogether. It is almost as if the transitional programme is a bib for them to regurgitate and beat their breasts with, but they don't really believe it applies to the situation in the concrete class struggles. This sectarian opportunist revision of the transitional programme is given 'theoretical' legitimacy in their misnamed-named hodgepodge 'Trotskyist Manifesto'. [2]

We will show that in theory and practice workers Power rejects the transitional programme when it is most required. Increasingly, Workers Power has been further characterised by a total capitulation to bourgeois democracy, and middle class public opinion. We have said this of them for five years and now some of their own sections have split away from them making the same charge.

The adaptation to middleclass public opinion has reached its peak in regards to the pro-imperialist policy Workers Power advance in relation to the war in Yugoslavia. but goes back to their fears of raising the demand 'victory to Iraq' during the Gulf war and their constant refusal to defend the gains of the October workers revolution in the former Soviet Union from capitalist restorationist and counter revolution which cloaks itself in the hypocritical gown of western 'bourgeois democracy'.

It has recently been revealed that the present leadership of Workers Power and the LRCI has for years been advancing the policy that it is correct to fight for bourgeois democracy within degenerated workers states. This shows a remarkable ignorance of class rule in capitalism, an ignorance all too often shared by groups like the USFI and Matgamna's Socialist Organiser who are so desperate to prove to the middle classes that socialists are more in favour of bourgeois democracy than the bourgeoisie.[3] Since its first progressive period during the English Civil War and the French revolution, bourgeois democracy has always been the political system to which capitalist exploitation is best suited. It is about abstract 'human rights' that hide class power. Counter revolution within the workers' states, whether healthy or degenerate, was always going to be best disguised in bottles marked 'democratic rights', especially when the so-called 'Communists' are so eager to swallow the whole bottle without studying the ingredients. Our pamphlet will show how Workers Power capitulation to middle class public opinion, which in Britain and most imperialist countries today means bourgeois democracy, has led it to adopt openly counter revolutionary positions.

#### What is the relevance of Workers Power?

The British left is dominated by ignorance and philistinism. So often a member of a larger organisation, i.e. SWP/Militant will reduce every political question to size, who's got a bigger group, you or us? Revolutionaries who have studied history know this is absurd. Lenin split with the Mensheviks because he demanded an organisation of professional revolutionaries, of leaders not just a mass party open to anyone who wants to sign the dated line on a card.

Our organisation, the RIL is a dramatic example of why we value quality over quantity. Over the past few year the RIL has led more successful struggles and engaged with more militant working class youth than many of the organisations ten or a hundred times our size. Of course we want to grow, but building an organisation that leads real struggle, and develops real leaders has always been our priority.

Workers Power, on the other hand, is a perfect example of a sect. There might even be ten times as many members of Workers Power as are in the RIL, but when did they last lead a struggle, when did they last even organise a march? Increasingly, Workers Power hasn't done anything. They can go to other peoples meetings and marches, criticise everyone else, and sell a few papers and that to them is active political work. No wonder that Workers Power has never tried to even talk to the working class youth that the RIL attracts to political activity they know those youth wouldn't be in the slightest bit interested in a group of people who treat revolution like an interesting schoolboy hobby.

Workers Power has become a sect; if it had the 9000 members the SWP boasts of it wouldn't be any better. It has no perspective of winning or even leading anything. And not surprisingly the sect has become a clique (the term cult might imply something more exciting than the mundane existence of this increasingly irrelevant group). A clique of leaders and full timers who go back years with one another run the group and demand personal loyalty from all its members. Some of the material from the recent splits will make that so apparent we need not comment further.

So, you may ask, if Workers Power are increasingly so irrelevant why waste our time writing about them? And this is a good question because the RIL does not believe that in order to win anyone to

revolutionary politics we must first deal with the problems of Workers Power. The opposite is true. The conservatism, routinist sect that Workers Power has become only serves as an example of how not to build a revolutionary organisation, how not to win workers and youth, how to abstain from struggle and criticise everyone else, how to turn revolution into its opposite - into a drinking club for left wing people who want a hobby and like to sound sanctimonious and a little bit intellectual. Part of the reason we write this pamphlet is because Workers Power has been an important force on the left before.

Many people genuine about the need for revolution have joined or looked with interest upon them. Despite our disagreements, we ourselves have fought shoulder to shoulder alongside them in battles against police, fascists, right-wing bureaucrats or other centrist groups trying to shut us up. It is important for the education of new generations of revolutionaries to examine the cause of the cancer that has taken over Workers Power.

But there is a wider reason. Workers Power is not just Workers Power in Britain, it is the principal section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, which as an international organisation claiming to be Trotskyist has attracted small but important groups of revolutionaries in a number of countries, who have one of the more left-wing elements thrown up by the fragmentation of the Fourth International.

As a section of the international Trotskyist Committee the RIL takes seriously the need to engage with such forces in a fight to build an international tendency committed to the regeneration and reconstruction of the Fourth International. We believe the recent split of the Latin American sections from Workers Power, following closely on the split of the New Zealand section to be a decisive turning point for the LRCI. There is no longer any national section within the LRCI that can fight to reverse the degeneration. The regime will no longer allow for that, and most of the remaining members are too crushed and tied in terms of personal loyalty to do anything except leave.

We don't gloat at this depressing spectacle, nor do we wish any harm to those comrades who have chosen to go down the road of degeneration. Frankly, we would be wasting our time to do either. Rather, we feel the recent split demands the drawing of a balance sheet, the learning of lessons - especially important to those youth getting involved in politics for the first time, and for those ex-members and ex-sections of Workers Power which must now ask themselves where to go next. And if there are people left inside Workers Power and the LRCI who want to build a genuine revolutionary party and are prepared to struggle to do that, then they should allow themselves to seriously consider the recent splits in their organisation, look at the true nature of their origins, and discuss with the RIL and ITC about how to regenerate the Fourth international, to rebuild a mass international Communist Party.

The recent splits in the LRCI Austria In spring 1995, the Austrian section of the LRCI, Arbeiter-Innenstandpunkt split. In 1992 Arbeiter-Innenstandpunkt was the largest far left group in Austria, bigger than either the Militant or the Austrian RKL. Arbeiter-Innenstandpunkt had won a number of youth who were quickly turned into sectarians.

The final straw in the degeneration for theThe final straw in the degeneration for the Arbeiter-Innenstandpunkt group came when they joined a right-wing Serbian monarchist demonstration in Vienna. They shared the same platform with the apologists, monarchists and clerical counterrevolutionaries from the former Yugoslavia, and failed to utter a word of criticism of Serbian nationalism. The only Serb member of the LRCI did try to make some attack on the monarchists and was promptly beaten up by Serb nationalists. Workers Power have refused to ever make any public or internal correction to this complete debacle. It is bad enough to make such a

mistake but to go on defending it years later spells disaster. The Austrian group ceased to grow and conservative pessimism set in. Earlier this year, the LRCI held what appears as a ridiculous debate to anyone outside the sect. They had an almighty argument about whether the political period in the world was counter-revolutionary with revolutionary potentials, or whether it was revolutionary, within a counter-revolutionary situation.

Such nonsense denotes an organisation that has lost any grip of Marxist dialectics. The world political situation is extremely contradictory. The collapse of Stalinism and the rightward shift of social democracy has intensified both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary pressures. The world is a more unstable place. But to generalise that it is either revolutionary (which clearly it is not) or that it is counter-revolutionary (suggesting the complete victory of reaction and the impossibility of making any practical revolutionary developments in the immediate future) is a nonsense. It is a classic attempt to try and make an abstract schema fit a complicated and concrete world.

Workers Power in Britain decided the period was now revolutionary. This has more to do with their celebration of the collapse of Stalinism than anything that existed in the class struggle, or that they thought they could actually do anywhere. A section of Arbeiter-Innenstandpunkt, decided it was counter-revolutionary and that, in fact, there was nothing much that could be done except make propaganda. This ridiculous argument led to the first of this year's splits. The result is that there are now two tiny sects in Austria both of which are in reality sterile passive propaganda groups.

#### New Zealand and Latin America

In September 1995, the 'Proletarian Faction' in the New Zealand section split. This was followed in October by the departure of the Peruvian and Bolivian sections, the only two Latin American sections of the LRCI and their only groups in neo-colonial countries. The two splits have different origins and some important different positions. They also share a great deal of correct criticisms of Workers Power and the LRCI.

The points of agreement include opposition to Workers Power's counter-revolutionary positions on the war in former Yugoslavia, where Workers Power have called on imperialists to give military support to the Bosnian state and supported the Bosnian army, whilst refusing to defend Serbs from NATO bombing.

They opposed Workers Power's support for the counterrevolutionary government in Lithuania, and their call for the Thatcher government to provide military aid to the pro capitalist government there to use against Soviet forces. They opposed Workers Power's 'united front' with Boris Yeltsin in the 1991 August coup in the USSR. Workers Power had demanded socialists take sides with one section of the old bureaucracy, the more openly pro-capitalist counter revolutionary and pro bourgeois democratic one, against another which was more antidemocratic and wanted a slower process of capitalist restoration.

Both opposed the insane line of the LRCI which stated that the Bolivian working class had suffered an historic defeat on the scale of the Paris Commune! They resisted this defeatism until the LRCI forced it to be finally published in Bolivia- on the eve of a one month general strike! They opposed Workers Power's positions on Haiti and Rwanda where Workers Power rejected elementary Marxism in failing to distinguish imperialism, refusing to allow for the possibility of ever supporting the Haitian government against a US military invasion, and backing the British and US sponsored Tutsi RPF in Rwanda during the mutually genocidal civil war with Hutus. They opposed Workers Power's call for a 'democratic' Popular front with the far right Islamic fundamentalists against the reactionary regime in Algeria. Many of them had opposed Workers Power's backsliding during the Gulf war between imperialism and Iraq. Workers Power -quickly retreated from demanding the victory of the oppressed nation, Iraq, once the war was in full swing.

In all these conflicts, we are completely with the sections that have split from the LRCI, in so far as we have been able to study their positions. Many of these criticisms have been made by us for many years, and they are developed in this pamphlet. Workers Power did not tolerate this opposition and it is clear that the internal regime of the LRCI made it increasingly impossible to wage these struggles from within. Bureaucratic suspensions and expulsions combined with splits became inevitable.

Like many in the LRCI, the New Zealand split off is '5th internationalist. 5th internationalism is usually an excuse for opportunist plans to lash up with any old left-wing reformist, Stalinist and petit-bourgeois nationalists, or for a sectarian refusal to intervene in the crisis of leadership. The split offs from the LRCI are proof to us, the ITC, that struggles for Trotskyism can still develop within the degenerated fragments of the Fourth International. We remain committed to a struggle for the political regeneration and organisational reconstruction of the Fourth International, the Latin American groups have always supported the policy of a reconstruction of the Fourth International, whilst Workers Power sit on the fence and try to pretend that the whole argument is about numbers.

The New Zealand section makes the mistake of adopting Workers Power's schematic logic concerning the world political situation. In opposition to Stalinophobic Workers Power's declaration that the world political situation is revolutionary, the New Zealand group declares it is counter-revolutionary.

Also the New Zealand group claims that capitalism has already been restored in the former USSR something that part conditions their analysis of the world political situation. The ITC does not believe that the qualitative restoration has yet been achieved, whilst the overall process flows rapidly in the capitalist direction.

The overwhelming majority of the criticisms that the Latin American and New Zealand comrades have made of the LRCI are correct. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and it is practice which will be the proof. In practical terms Workers Power's centrist method has made it redundant. It surely must have badly affected the work of the Latin American and New Zealand sections as well. But the most important point leading to the split for us is not the struggle over Eastern Europe or Yugoslavia, centrally important though these questions are for Trotskyists, but the resistance to the attempts of the LRCI leadership to impose an analysis of the political situation in Bolivia which would rule out any intervention in the class struggle.

The episode is an example of Workers Power's rotten method. According to the LRCI the Bolivian working class has, since 1986 suffered a strategic and historical defeat with the massive cutbacks in the mines and privatisation. Workers Power said this defeat was as deep as that of the French working class after the Paris Commune was smashed and drowned in blood in 1871. They equated a series of important defeats of a combative working class - which had not lost its combatively - to the world historical defeat of the World's first attempt to establish a workers' state.

The Bolivian comrades recognised that the workers had suffered serious defeats and setbacks, and that the bourgeoisie was on the offensive with further large-scale privatisations. But they knew that to accept the LRCI's analysis would condemn them to a passive, propagandist existence in the face of a reality that was much more complicated and where the active struggle working class had not yet been crushed.

Despite heated protests against this new line dictated by Workers Power's 'Red Professors' from their London computer keyboards, the Bolivian section was finally forced to swallow it. Their resistance brought them up against the bureaucratic internal regime of the LRCI. They were told

that they would be suspended from the LRCI if they did not print the 'official' line in their Bolivian paper. They printed the line earlier this year, just before the outbreak of the General Strike in Bolivia. Such an obviously foolish line must have made the Bolivian comrades look like clowns in their own class struggle.

The Latin American comrades clearly saw that the un-Marxist methods of the LRCI would destroy the possibilities of revolutionary work in their countries. And the internal regime was clearly making a fight against these methods impossible. The leadership tried to suspend José Ville, a leading Bolivian comrade in London for receiving a fax asking him to join the New Zealand faction. Then they suspended him for trying to go to the International Executive Committee, of which he was an alternate member, and where he would have had the proxy vote of two absent full members from Latin America, and said that he would be expelled if he went to the meeting. He was threatened with discipline for doing almost anything.

#### Workers Power's gutter response

In typical fashion, Workers Power has attempted to obscure the real political disagreements with a cocktail of slanders, misrepresentations, character assassinations, appeals to moral hysteria and assorted gutter rantings. When all else fails the Workers Power leaders resort to labelling all opponents as individualistic, undisciplined thieves against the workers movement

The five-page Workers Power "Statement on the Expulsion of José Villa and the suspension of Poder Obrero (Bolivia) from the LRCI" (issued on October 13, 1995) is no exception. The statement claims that the Peruvian section of the LRCI was de-recognised in "mid '94, having proven unable to carry out the minimum obligations of a section". Yet the October-November '95 issue of Trotskyist international, the international journal of the LRCI, proudly lists the Peruvian section amongst all its others. It laughingly accuses the Bolivian section of failing 'to assist the European sections in their solidarity work with the teachers and peasants fighting the state of emergency in Bolivia' (!).

Because Villa refused to take a side in reactionary conflicts, maintaining the position of the independence of the working class, he is accused of "increasingly blaming the oppressed nations and ethnic groups of the former Stalinist states and the semi colonies, from the Baltic states to Rwanda and Bosnia, for the collapse of Stalinist and anti-imperialist regimes, stigmatising them all as pawns of imperialism in its destructive work". But it goes further, for sharing our position of neutrality between the warring factions in the former Yugoslavia, but 'defence of any one of them from imperialist aggression (in this case the Bosnian Serbs bombarded by NATO), Workers Power say that Villa has "declared his solidarity with the genocidal Bosnian Serbs"!

Villa was an "unreformable" cult leader hostile to discipline, so Workers Power tell us. But the most important thing is to come: "in the shortest terms our attitude to Poder Obrero depends on whether they possess a shred of revolutionary morality. The Bolivian section has kept the money sent to them for an air fare and have not to date returned it, despite many requests to do so. Clearly it they do not - and we still hope that they will despite their spilt - this would bring into the whole situation a question of their honesty and honour as revolutionaries".

Once again, Workers Power seek to hide the political argument by whipping up a moral outrage for their version of revolutionary morality against a world of 'thieves' and 'robbers'. When Chris Brind split it was the computer, now it is an airline ticket. Any piece of tittle-tattle will do for the workers Power leaders to demand loyalty by creating an anti-political and hysterical atmosphere.

In issuing such crap the Workers Power leaders display even more contempt for their own members than they do for Villa and those who have split. Because anyone who swallows all this in

place of a political examination of the questions concerned must be a total wooden head.

### The roots of the crisis

The LRCI's recent series of splits is the result of the contradictions in its politics. These contradictions have festered because of the inconsistency of its evolution towards Trotskyism and the political compromises and deliberately ambiguous formulae which the leadership has employed to hold together an essentially unprincipled grouping.

Since the LRCI was built around and has always been politically dominated by its largest section, Workers Power in Britain, the causes and history of its degeneration are fundamentally those of Workers Power. However, not only were they apparent before the formation of the LRCI, but many of the central problems were incorporated in or 'smoothed over' by its founding document the so-called Trotskyist Manifesto. That is why comrades, who are now breaking with Workers Power and the LRCI and defending Trotskyist positions on Eastern Europe and aspects of the permanent revolution, must re-examine its history and method as a whole, particularly as demonstrated by the sharp tests of practice.

Workers Power's degeneration cannot simply be attributed to the impact of the crisis of Stalinism and the low level of class struggle in Britain since the foundation of the LRCI, even though these factors have brought the problems to a head.

Workers Power's method has always been characterised by an 'academic', formalistic and essentially mechanical attitude to Marxist theory and programme. Its practical work has been marked by frequent zigzags between propaganda group sectarianism and 'joint work' based on a limited, wooden understanding of the united front tactic. Over recent years this has united sectarianism with increasingly crude opportunism, exemplified by its ill fated adaptation to Red Action inside Anti-Fascist Action in the early '90s.

Now this method takes the form of conservative passivity in 'practical' work, and a literary output designed to provide a convoluted 'Marxist' cover for positions which are in fact an accommodation to the shifts of British liberal middle class opinion, principally with regard to developments in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The roots of the crisis lie in the incomplete and partial nature of Workers Power's break with the politics and methods of Tony Cliff's International Socialists (subsequently the SWP) in the 1970s, and of its movement towards Trotskyism. The group's early struggles undoubtedly had a generally positive character, both against Cliff and subsequently against the rightward moves of Matgamna's International Communist League which they were briefly part of before its Socialist Organiser phase. In the course of these struggles they turned increasingly to Trotskyist positions and made correct criticisms of the theories and practice of many of the groups claiming to be Trotskyist. Thus, though they always tended to approach struggles on the basis of abstract propaganda interventions and ultimatums, like their 'take-it-or-leave-it' fusion proposal to the Workers Revolutionary Party after its expulsion of Gerry Healy in 1985.

The inconsistency in the break with Cliffism was clear then, however, and in three main areas: its understanding of the theory of permanent revolution; its attitude to the Fourth International and the Trotskyist Transitional Programme, and its essentially economic approach to the special oppression issues (racism, sexism and anti-lesbian anti-gay bigotry). The last six years have also shown that the dominant leadership only partially broke from a Cliffite view of the formerly Stalinist-ruled states.

Workers Power's understanding of permanent revolution was displayed at a relatively early stage in its political evolution. One of the key tests for Trotskyist organisations at the beginning of the '80s was their attitude to the Iranian revolution of 1979, the counterrevolutionary Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini and the war between Iran and Iraq.

The main international currents claiming to be Trotskyist adapted in varying degrees to the spurious anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Islamic clergy with tragic results for the emerging forces of Iranian Trotskyism. When the war broke out between Iraq and Iran organisations like the Mandelites USFI took an Iranian defencist position arguing that Iraq was an agent of western imperialism and that the Khomeini regime's war against Iraq was a defence of the revolution. Iraq, then as now, was a neo-colonial country but the Saddam Hussein regime was using Arab nationalism and a close relationship with the Soviet bureaucracy to maintain a relative independence from the imperialists it was using the turmoil following the fall of the Shah to strengthen its own regional position. The imperialists saw the war as a chance to contain both these unreliable regimes and ensure that neither came out victorious.

From the start before the war broke out the main concern of Iran's Islamic government had been to derail the revolutionary mass movement that had toppled the Shah and crush the militant forces of the working class. It used the war to complete the destruction of the revolution. The left-wing of the Iranian Trotskyists, the HKS correctly took a revolutionary defeatist position to the war, fighting for the independent defence of the organs of working class revolution the Shores (factory councils). This was the position argued at the time by the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC) the forerunner of the ITC.

Workers Power failed to take this principled revolutionary position. Its line during the early stages of the war was closer to the centrism of the Mandelites, arguing that to support Iran against Iraq in the war was necessary for the defence of the revolution. Later, of course, they changed their line (so did the Mandelites eventually). Not of course that they admitted a mistake! - No. The war had simply 'changed its character' and 'become' reactionary on both sides. In fact it was precisely in the early stages of the war, when there were still possibilities of struggle by the Iranian working class against the Khomeini regime that it was most important to maintain a revolutionary defeatist position. However much Workers Power decks out its position with 'left' criticisms of the regime, the fact is that their line of argument would have placed them among the Mensheviks in Russia during 1917.

The limitations of workers Power's understanding of permanent revolution was displayed at a relatively early stage in its political evolution. One of the key tests for Trotskyist organisations It is an instructive example because it prefigures so much of Workers Power's subsequent political development. For example, by its support for the Tutsi-dominated and pro-imperialist, Ugandan backed Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) during last year's civil war. It was necessary for Trotskyists to fight for integrated workers' and peasants' defence organisations, independent of both sides and giving support to neither. - the position the RIL argued for in Revolutionary Fighter No. 3. A further example, is Workers Power's call for a 'united front' (in fact a popular front) in Algeria, against the regime's state of emergency and military repression, to include the reactionary, fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)

In neo-colonial countries it is essential to fight for a united front of the anti-imperialist forces of the working class and the peasants the impoverished petit-bourgeoisie and the urban poor fighting for their own interests against their own capitalists and landlords, Trotskyists have to fight for such united fronts, without which the revolutionary victory of the working class is impossible in the great majority of neo-colonial countries.

The leaders of Workers Power were incapable of making a clear, honest distinction between that vital, necessary line of struggle and the possibility of occasional, episodic blocs with the neocolonial bourgeoisie, or sections of its forces, when they find themselves in temporary conflict with the imperialists. They are all 'united fronts' and all united fronts are they keep reminding us, just 'tactics' around immediate practical questions.

These 'theoreticians' use such word—games to try and justify their confusion and the dangerously mistaken policies it has led to in the cases of Iran, Algeria and Rwanda arguing in favour of working class support for reactionary bourgeois forces which are not fighting imperialism but trying to control the masses.

In the fashion of lawyers or theologians looking for literary precedents to cover their current positions they 'mine' the documents of the early Comintern conferences for appropriate quotations about united fronts with the national bourgeoisie. Their lifeless approach ignores the actual method of the revolutionary Comintern, the concrete conditions under which the discussions took place, and the experience of revolutionary struggles in the colonial and neocolonial countries since then - including Trotsky's analysis of the struggles in China, India etc. But in the way that opportunism and sectarianism are always opposite sides of the same coin, Workers Power's failure to apply the method of permanent revolution comes out in a blind sectarian attitude to nationalist movements or struggles that are actually a focus for the struggles of the advanced workers and the fighting masses.

This has been particularly clear over questions of electoral support. An early example was the initial refusal of Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group to call for a vote to Sinn Fein in the north of Ireland elections in the early 80s, despite the importance of the Republican military struggle against British imperialism, let alone the clear indications of the strength of its base among the most oppressed and militant sections of the nationalist working class. Subsequently they changed their position, merely commenting that they had not realised that Sinn Fein would get so many votes, as though it was just the number of crosses on ballot papers!

Much more recently we have seen a similar example of this sectarianism in the South African elections though without any possible excuse that they did not know the ANC would get so many votes. Trotskyists have to fight to break the workers and the masses from the ANC. In the elections it was essential to fight for independent working class organisation and action, to expose the treachery of the ANC, and to call for the unions and mass organisations to build a Workers Party. But this fight had to be taken into the living experience of the masses, who saw a vote for the ANC as constituting themselves as a nation, voting for social change and defending 'their' elections against sabotage. That is why we understood that on that basis and as part of that strategy (and not for any other reasons) consistent Trotskyists had to be in favour of a vote for the ANC.

Not Workers Power though. They could not bring themselves to vote for the ANC. They can vote for any bunch of counterrevolutionary social democrats on the basis that they are a bourgeois workers party. But the ANC and Sinn Fern are not bourgeois workers' parties. They are petit bourgeois or bourgeois nationalists and the ANC, moreover, is a popular front. That is how political arguments are settled by Workers Power: it is just a matter finding the right label. We are not quarrelling with the labels here, we are disagreeing with the LRCI's un-Marxist method of settling questions of revolutionary strategy and tactics -put a movement in the right category and up pops the appropriate response. This is a sectarian method which ignores the real questions of the movement and consciousness of the masses, of the advanced sections of the working class and youth, of their relationships to the various organisations and leaders, and of finding the most effective and dynamic way to intervene in their struggles and change the consciousness of the

advanced workers.

So in the South African elections the LRCI ended up calling for a vote for the Workers List Party, an electoral front for a small centrist sect which got less than 1% of the vote. Moreover they knew perfectly well that this group actually opposed fighting for the unions to form a Workers Party, and that their electoral adventure was part of their sabotage of the Committee for a Workers Party. But never mind - they were not nationalists and they were not a popular front! In both cases the opportunism towards reactionary bourgeois forces and the sectarianism towards the masses, mechanical formulae have replaced Marxist analysis and revolutionary strategy. It is not surprising therefore, that the most important opposition to the dominant Workers Power leadership within the LRCI has come from its sections in neo-colonial countries.

#### The compromise on the question of the International.

The same mechanical approach and resort to ambiguous compromise formulae marks the LRCI's attitude to the vital question of the International. There can be no more important question for Trotskyists than the strategy for building the International. It is not possible to build a genuinely revolutionary international tendency without clarity on this issue. But the LRCI has been built on an unclear compromise on this very question, combining sectarianism and opportunism.

The two most recent splits illustrate the inevitable unravelling of the compromise. The New Zealand faction calls for a Fifth International. The ITC disagrees with this position and considers it fundamentally sectarian, but it is nevertheless a position with some consistency. On the other hand the Bolivian and Peruvian comrades have historically, before and since their membership of the LRCI, stood for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. This position is much closer to the ITC's - though of course there is more to a strategy than a mere form of words.

Of course the Workers Power leadership has written extensively about the mistakes and degeneration of the main international and national Trotskyist groupings over the last half century, and the great bulk of their criticisms are perfectly correct. At bottom, however, this is the same familiar, abstract method, as though the issues are settled by listing the mistakes.

At the end of the 1940s the Fourth International qualitatively degenerated into centrism. Centrist methods and positions were shared by all sections of the leadership before the split. Both sides in the split were marked by the same centrist features. The resulting crisis of the Fourth International has been and remains the sharpest expression of the international crisis of working class leadership in the second half of the twentieth century. For Workers Power, recognising that centrist degeneration means that the Fourth International can simply be pronounced dead – and the real problems for revolutionaries can be ignored. For Lenin and Trotsky, recognising the points at which it was necessary to break with the Second and Third Internationals respectively was a question of when the fight for the political independence of the working class could only be taken forward by launching a new, independent revolutionary international.

The grounds for that decision were different in the two cases. With the Second international it was determined by the role of the bureaucratic layers dominating the mass organisations in the imperialist war. With Trotsky's break from the Comintern, the decisive point was neither when it became centrist, nor when it became counter-revolutionary, but when its conduct of policy during the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany and its response to that crisis signalled that there was no possibility of continuing the fight for its regeneration.

With the crisis of the Fourth international the question is to apply the method of Lenin and Trotsky, not to try and cull analogies from quite different historical circumstances. The fragments of the Fourth International have in practice abandoned the fight to apply and develop the

Transitional Programme. Nevertheless the Trotskyist programme has remained a focus internationally for the most politically advanced layers breaking from social democracy, Stalinism and nationalism. That attraction has brought them into the centrist fragments. Time after time this contradiction has led to explosions and struggles in which some elements have sought, to a greater or lesser clarity to reassert the Trotskyist programme, or certain elements of it.

The origins of the LRCI's Latin American sections in a struggle against the leadership of the Bolivian POR is a case in point. And so to is their fight against the LRCI's rightward movement on Eastern Europe, its passivity towards the class struggle in Latin America itself and its bureaucratic methods of control.

It is for these reasons that the ITC does not consider that the Fourth International is simply dead for purposes of revolutionary struggle. It has not had its own equivalent of an August 1914 or a January 1933. An international tendency working for serious and principled revolutionary regroupment has to have an international strategy to intervene actively in this contradiction - that is the strategy of fighting for the political regeneration and organisational reconstruction of the Fourth International.

Workers Power's leadership have never been able to take that step. But they know that in practice the forces that they can win are going to come from struggles within the fragments of the Fourth international, so they want to keep their options open, for instance to groups like the Latin American comrades. Hence they do not call for the Fifth International. They declare that the number is not important they are simply for a 'New' international.

This is just slippery fudge by the Workers Power leadership. Of course the number itself is in a sense not the important thing: what matters is the strategy. Their deliberately ambiguous formula means that an international grouping can be built for a time at least which combines elements with opposed views on this vital question, held together by a 'catchall' slogan which embodies no strategy at all. All that the leadership has to do is issue denunciations and ultimatums. Once again opportunism and sectarianism are opposite sides of the same coin.

#### Special oppression issues and the influence of economism on Workers Power

On few issues has the ITC be attacked more vociferously or misrepresented more grossly by the Workers Power leadership than on the questions of special oppression. More than anywhere else, the continuing influence of Cliffite economism on Workers Power is shown in its analysis and policy on special oppression which it rather oddly prefers to call 'social' oppression (as though there are some sections of the working class and the masses who are not oppressed in class society!).

Workers Power has of course moved beyond the crudities of the SWP on these questions. It defends lesbian and gay rights, the self organisation of women and black people etc.. On some of the questions of democratic rights it has correctly taken radical positions that go much further than most of the left in Britain - calling for the abolition of the age of consent laws, for instance. But it has failed to develop a real Marxist analysis of the relationship between class exploitation and special oppression, which understands the roots of special oppression in the development of class society, the ways in which oppression on the basis of race, sex and sexual orientation is not directly reducible to class exploitation and the essential role of all these forms of oppression in maintaining class society.

Without such an analysis it is impossible to develop a strategy for the working class to lead the struggle against any of these forms of oppression, The ITC maintains that the fight against all aspects of racism, sexism and anti-lesbian/anti-gay bigotry has a strategic role in the fight for

working class power, because of their role in class society. without this fight the working class cannot overcome its own divisions, gain a clear understanding of capitalist society and its own revolutionary role, or win oppressed sections of the petit bourgeoisie to its leadership. Conversely the oppressed cannot win the struggle for liberation without the revolutionary victory of the working class.

We ask every honest supporter of the LRCI - where in this is the popular frontism and capitulation to petit bourgeois leaderships which your leaders constantly accuse the ITC of? Our method is based on that which Lenin sets out in 'What is to be Done? :

*"... To react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects: to take advantage of every event to clarify for all (Lenin's emphasis) the world-historic: significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat. '*

The method of Workers Power bears too many similarities to the 'economists' who Lenin was criticising. Thus Workers Power has an obsession with the sociological class composition or movements of the oppressed, especially, in fact, with lesbian gay movements, rather than with the political class character and orientation of the leadership and policies which it should be fighting for. The result is that Workers Power never goes beyond either trade unionist or democratic (civil rights) demands in relation to the movements of the specially oppressed. Thus it is not the ITC, but Workers Power, that limits the political struggles of the specially oppressed to liberal, purely democratic politics as well as failing to challenge prejudice consistently in the course of other struggles. The history of Workers Flower is littered with examples of both types of mistake. If we repeat some key examples now it is because of the need to combat a sustained campaign of misrepresentation - and because at the end of the day the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

The highpoint of Workers Powers lesbian and gay work, and its final limit, was without doubt the Trade Unionists against Section 28 campaign in the late 1980s. Workers Power comrades were right to take the fight against Section 28, the most serious institutional attempt by the state to attack the gains of the lesbian gay movement, into the unions. The problem was that they limited this to a narrow trade union, workplace perspective.

Thus they called for non-cooperation by council unions, and for strike action to defend any workers who were discriminated against on grounds of sexual orientation. At the Trade Unionists against Section 28 conferences others argued that the biggest affect of the Section 28 would be in whipping up a reactionary anti-lesbian anti-gay climate, which would lead to an increase in physical attacks (this is exactly what happened, in fact). And proposed a motion calling for labour movement organisations to maintain and defend any lesbian gay facilities threatened with closure as a result of Section 28, and to organise the physical defence of lesbian gay centres, clubs, bars etc. from anti lesbian/anti gay attacks.

We are at a loss to see what is popular frontist or liberal about this proposal, but workers Power opposed it, and united with the SWP and Militant to vote it down. The other side of the economic outlook which lay behind that decision was demonstrated at the founding conference of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation in November 1989. RIL members who were Delegates to the conference moved a motion stressing the importance of drawing the most oppressed sections of society into a truly integrated movement to smash the poll tax. The motion made it clear that this would be impossible without a fight against the influence of racism, sexism and homophobia in the movement, and that therefore racist, sexist and anti-lesbian anti-gay activity was incompatible with membership of the anti poll tax movement. Those words were chosen with care, because this was not a motion to automatically exclude anyone with backward ideas from the fight against the poll

tax, which is how Workers Power misrepresented it when they opposed the motion. because in the face of the opposition to the motion from Militant who controlled the conference, they chose to abstain - even though we had won very wide support from delegates and were having a major impact on Militant members many of whom made it clear to our comrades that they opposed the line that had been imposed on them.

It was not the first time, nor was it to be the last, that Workers Power has failed to challenge prejudice or refused to support a policy commitment to fight prejudice within broad campaigns. Always they defend themselves with essentially economistic argument about united fronts around immediate practical issues, and then resort to misrepresentation.

The reverse side of this method is Workers Power's repeated refusal to challenge the limited democratic politics of the petit bourgeois leaders of the lesbian gay movement. A national demonstration against Clause 25, a measure designed to restrict lesbian and gay adoption rights was called for February 1991. By the time of the demonstration, of course, the imperialist attack on Iraq was in full swing. Many took the view that the question of the war was of central importance for every struggle of the working class and the oppressed in Britain. and raised the slogan Victory to Iraq on the march. and our speaker raised it on the platform at the end of the march and was cheered by a section of the demonstration. Workers Power members refused to join in the slogans on the march, but limited themselves to calls for 'lesbian and gay rights'. When our speaker got down from the platform a member of Workers Power, who was due to speak on behalf of the Hands Off the Middle East Committee criticised him, complaining that he should not have used that slogan because it would make it more difficult for him (the WP member) to get to speak.

More recently, in antiracist and antifascist work, Workers Power has taken to using the slogan Support *black self-defence*. Of course this is something we have to support, as a basic civil right, and there are circumstances where we would be in favour of calling for it and organising it but it cannot be the programme that Trotskyists should fight for in general, because it leaves the black communities isolated and does nothing to mobilise integrated working class action. Yet when, two years ago, Workers Power put forward a programme for an attempt to set up new London anti-fascist network, this was their only reference to organised defence. They opposed an amendment from the RIL to change the demand to organise worker/community defence. If anyone has been adapting to liberal popular frontism here it is Workers Power, not the RIL or the ITC.

The developments of movements and struggles of the specially oppressed have been a significant feature of the period since the second world war, especially since the 1960s. These movements have by and large developed separately from the workers' movements, and under the political domination of petit-bourgeois or bourgeois leaders, because of the unresolved crisis of working class leadership. Thus the ability to respond to these developments as revolutionary Marxists is a critical test of the political health of groups claiming to be Trotskyist.

In this area, too, Workers Power's break with its Cliffite background has been incomplete and it has imposed a confused half-way house of radical democratic and economist positions on the LRCI.

#### Workers Power's practice: the united front

The key test of revolutionary organisations is what they do, not what they say. And it is in its practice in Britain, and most notably in its understanding, or rather misunderstanding, of the united front that its centrism and its general rightwards trajectory are most clear.

Before the Iraq war started Workers Power, along with the RIL and the Workers International League, argued that once war started the position of the united front Hands Off the Middle East Committee should immediately be Victory for Iraq, and together we won that position on the committee. Once the war started, however, Workers Power started to edge away from the priority given to that centrally important slogan. We are proud that in the two main imperialist countries engaged in the war it was sections of the ITC, the RIL in Britain and the revolutionary Workers League in the USA, that were in the forefront of the fight for Victory to Iraq line (in the USA, totally alone in any practical work). Workers Power, on the other hand increasingly accommodated to wavered on the HOME committee.

This became increasingly pronounced in the latter stages of the war when talk of a split in the popular frontist Committee Against the War in the Gulf held out to Workers Power the prospect of a broader campaign in which they could join with the SWP. Then we started to hear the argument that the slogan is less important than getting some action.

Of course we would support and build concrete action, including united fronts on a lower level than the Victory to Iraq slogan, wherever that would advance the struggle - but that would mean that it could not be at the expense of or counterposed to the central anti-imperialist demand. But as so often with Workers Power the possibility of a limited united front becomes an alternative or a block to raising vitally important elements of a Trotskyist programme.

Workers Power opposed the HOME committee, putting out a leaflet on the 2nd March CND demonstration opposing a motion that the committee should be based on "Victory to Iraq" and then voted for "Stop the War – Cease Fire Now" as the basis for the committee (before the war the LRCI had described this as 'A hopeless pacifist slogan').

The war demonstrated what were to become increasingly common features of Workers Power's practice- accommodation to left-liberal opinion, which of course is an expression of bourgeois 'public opinion' and a view of the united front, which puts a dubious pretence of 'unity' above the fight to win the most advanced workers and youth to revolutionary politics.

After the war this became clear again in antifascist work, principally in Anti-Fascist Action (AFA). With the growth of racist and fascist activity in the course of 1991, AFA could have been an important organising centre for antifascist defence. However it was dominated by Red Action, a small splinter-group from the SWP which has a totally rotten, squadist and substitutionist approach to the political fight against fascism. It opposes building mass action as part of the fight against fascism and refuses to have any orientation to black and Asian youth under attack. It quite consciously states that its constituency is white working class youth. AFA was built on the basis of these politics and Workers Power did not challenge them and went along with their squadism. The argument was that this was a specific limited united front for the purpose of confronting the fascists. However it was built on a definite political perspective that excluded mass action and an orientation to the black communities, and its outlook was promoted in a regular magazine by Workers Power members. For Workers Power the united front had to be kept on the level of their allies.

It was only the RIL that challenged Red Action's method in practice and through internal discussion in AFA. We were witch hunted, expelled and physically attacked as a result. Our black comrades in particular were singled out for abuse and attack. There are plenty of members of Workers Power who know all about this, but their organisation did not defend us because we were undermining their opportunist relationship with Red Action.

Instead they concentrated their fire on us claiming that we were trying to turn AFA into a 'propaganda bloc' by putting forward too full a programme. not raised to the level that was demanded by the nature of the struggle and the possible role of the actual united front - in this case a small, permanent bloc of left activists.

In particular we raised the question of anti-racism, because It was clear that without an anti-racist perspective it is not possible to have an orientation to the black and Asian communities, or to build an integrated movement, or to combat fascism ideologically, or to build mass working class action. Red Actions 'orientation' to the white working class (which, of course, meant that they never won any white workers or youth) was an absolute obstacle to building an effective antifascist movement.

Disgracefully the 'Trotskyists' of Workers Power became the attorneys for the Red Action thugs. We were treated to elaborate 'theoretical' explanations of why an antiracist united front was different from an anti-fascist united front, and why therefore it was wrong to demand of AFA that it should take up a fight against racism.

Of course they suffered the fate of all opportunists - once we had been expelled and Red Action were tired of them they turned on Workers Power, who eventually had to get out of AFA. But because the leaders of Workers Power are as infallible as the Pope there could not be any honest balance sheet of its experience in AFA. Instead the reason for quitting was put down to AFA's sectarianism towards the SWP and the ANL.

The story of the Workers Power involvement in AFA indicates many of its basic political problems ~ its opportunist and limited view of the united front tactic, its inability to understand the importance and relevance of the struggle against special oppression, and its leaders' arrogant refusal to give an honest account of political mistakes.

#### Workers Power and the transitional programme

Revising the fundamental starting point of Trotsky's Fourth International, the Transitional Programme, Workers Power challenge the notion that the crisis of humanity can be reduced to the crisis of proletarian leadership. The LRCI's Trotskyist Manifesto boldly declares: *"However today it would be wrong simply to repeat that all contemporary crises are 'reduced to a crisis of leadership'". The proletariat world-wide does not yet face the stark alternative of either taking power or seeing the destruction of all its past gains. Nevertheless, in many countries and, indeed, whole continents, the crisis of leadership does reach such a level of acuteness"*.

This shows a fundamental misunderstanding of Trotskyism. They are saying that the crisis of leadership can only be central in revolutionary type situations. But what factors push society from nonrevolutionary to revolutionary and from revolutionary to counter-revolutionary situations? And what factors are responsible for the low levels of class struggle and political activity by the working class in nonrevolutionary periods. The question of leadership is fundamental to this. The central factor remains the crisis of proletarian leadership.

Trotsky never meant that only the crisis of leadership was important and when that was resolved all other factors would automatically fall into place. Such an approach, like Workers Power's revision of Trotsky, shows an abandonment of dialectics and a refusal to understand the dynamics of struggle. The working class defeats suffered in recent years, the disorientation of workers' organisations, the political demoralisation and disinterest on the part of some workers. all of these things are fundamentally caused by the crisis of leadership. The impact of defeats can reinforce that crisis, as the relationship between the class and its leadership is a dialectical and dynamic one.

However the essential point in this relationship is the crisis of proletarian leadership: the epoch we live in makes conditions for socialism ripe. The misleadership of the workers and oppressed movements is capitalism's last salvage. The fundamental task of Trotskyists remains the resolution of the leadership crisis. To misunderstand this is to misunderstand the central basis for the creation of the Fourth International. The LRCI's position on the crisis of leadership would suggest that the struggle for an international Trotskyist vanguard party is no longer of prime importance rather we should join up with reformist, Stalinist and centrist leaderships to 'help' the workers regain their combativity so that in future the crisis of leadership could once again be central!

Along with this revisionism Workers Power have a centrist approach to transitional demands. On paper they can raise many correct demands, but when faced with practice they backslide. This is shown in the example we have referred to before. Workers Power's refusal to raise the demand of worker/community defence preferring all kinds of other more liberal sounding demands instead, such as 'support black self-defence' or 'self-defence is no offence'.

The difference between these two approaches helps us understand the real practical importance of the transitional method. Because of the high level of organised racist attacks and murders on the black and Asian communities in parts of Britain, many youth have automatically been forced to organise some spontaneous level of 'self-defence'. The demand for worker/community defence was raised by the RIL because it was able to intercept with the most militant vanguard sections - in this case the youth under attack - and take them forward instead of just giving them a slogan they already organised around. This demand posed the question of a political fight within the working class for active organisation against racist violence and fascist activity. It raised the fundamental question of who controls the streets, estates, schools, colleges or workplaces: The black and white working class, united in a struggle against racism and fascism, or the racist state which protects the fascist and racist gangs.

The slogan of worker/community defence is conceived from the standpoint of taking a struggle further, developing it into a greater struggle, broadening the involvement of sections of the working class and youth. It is an immediately relevant concrete demand as well as one which ultimately leads to struggles that threaten capitalist power itself. It is a transitional demand the RIL has been able to organise mass mobilisations around, in Shadwell for instance on a scale Workers Power has never done.

The demand for 'self-defence' on the other hand takes nothing forward. Of course we must support those who are defending themselves. But our task cannot be to simply support struggles as they spontaneously develop but to take them forward, to offer them a programme that raises the political level and broadens the struggle against the capitalist system, in other words to lead the struggles with transitional demands.

This is the difference between the transitional method, and the all too common understanding of it by centrists from militant to Socialist Outlook. We use transitional demands as immediately relevant ways of developing, broadening and raising the political level of struggles today. They see them as making a struggle slightly more 'left-wing', of demanding something capitalism cannot support, of making propaganda.

Whatever the abstract correctness of Workers Powers propaganda, when faced with sharp struggle, in the community campaign that drove the BNP off the streets in Brick Lane or in organising around racist attacks, Workers Power has constantly sided with the centrists and opposed us and our transitional demands that could take the struggles forward.

The same is true about the worker/community tribunal we fought for and organised following the police murder of Brian Douglas in South London this year. The aim of the tribunal was to go beyond the anger that many black youth and workers have towards the racist police, to challenge the illusions that somehow the state can achieve justice, and to create a movement that understands that only the working class and black communities can deal with racist police. Our whole conception was based on this, the struggle for a movement that wanted independent action against police and state murders as well as court cover ups.

We won Important sections of Lambeth Unison, the biggest trade union in Lambeth, to this conception and we got and Unison organised such a public tribunal. Workers Power turned up and tried to close the tribunal down, stating that what was needed was an inquiry with a panel of 'important figures in the black community' that had established reputations in the eyes of black people (MPs etc.) to head the inquiry. This panel would pass verdict on the police, not the community itself. Workers Power said this might then convince more people that the police did murder Brian Douglas.

The problem was that we wanted to go beyond that, the overwhelming majority of black and white youth who had heard about it, knew the police were responsible for the murder. The question was what do we do about it. Our proposal for a tribunal was to aid the building of a movement that takes justice into its own hands. Workers Power's craven opportunism was conceived from the standpoint of making attractive and acceptable propaganda. Workers Power's proposals would have demobilised any struggle and given the bureaucrats the control back. We are not opposed to any number of liberal bourgeois inquiries, but to raise it in opposition to a workers/community tribunal, when that had already been established by the biggest trade union in the area, is the opposite of the transitional method. Unsurprisingly, all the rank-and-file workers from Lambeth voted down Workers Power's right-wing proposal.

#### Electoral support and Workers Power's conservatism – adaption to social democracy

The narrow understanding of the united front is reflected in a conservative application of the tactic of electoral support. We have already discussed an example of this in South Africa but the LRCI has made apparently opposite but in fact directly related mistakes in recent elections in Britain and France.

The only purpose of electoral support for the Labour Party, or any other bourgeois workers party, to break the most class conscious workers from reformism. (We know bourgeois workers parties once in power will always turn against the workers). Where sections of the working class are coming into political conflict with the reformist bureaucracy and are breaking from it electorally, Trotskyists should in general give critical support to those workers, and seek to develop such resistance.

On that basis the RIL called for a vote for all three Militant candidates in the last general election, because all of them clearly had a real base that was in conflict with the politics of the Labour leadership. And because of the importance of the anti-poll tax struggle which had brought millions of workers into conflict with the Labour politicians carrying out this Tory policy at local level, which Militant was campaigning against.

Workers Power only supported the two candidates who had previously been sitting Labour MPs and had been expelled by the party. For them having a base could only be measured formally in terms of Labour movement positions. They refused to support Tommy Sheridan the former chair of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation in Glasgow, even though Glasgow had had the highest non-payment of the poll tax, and had mass mobilisations to stop court officers removing

the goods of non-payers.

Not surprisingly Sheridan got a substantial vote - 19%. Workers Power could only 'apologise' that they did not have anybody in Glasgow! But they have not learned. Whereas the RIL has had a general policy of critical support for Militant candidates in local elections, Workers Power has refused to do the same, even though they normally get between 10% and 20% of the vote, and in some cases more, representing a significant section of the most class conscious workers who are voting for what they see as a militant alternative to the Labour bureaucrats.

In the French presidential elections earlier this year the LRCI stuck to the same policy of backing the main bourgeois workers' party, in this case the Socialists of the outgoing president, Mitterrand. They refused to call for a vote for the candidate of Lutte Ouvrière, an organisation which presents itself as Trotskyist and has a significant working class membership, which regularly picks up hundreds of thousands of votes in elections. Of course, Lutte Ouvrière got 6% of the vote. A significant section of the working class rejecting the established social-democratic and Stalinist leaderships. In these cases Workers Power's mechanical ideas of electoral support which led it to call for a vote for the irrelevant 'Workers List' candidates in South Africa, meant that they ignored the development, among the most class conscious workers, of a resistance to the betrayals of the reformists.

#### The LRCI and the crisis of Stalinism

More than anything else it is the development of the crisis of Stalinism since 1989 that has accelerated the LRCI's general rightward movement, and brought the crisis of the LRCI to a head. At every critical turn of events in Eastern Europe the Workers Power/LRCI leadership has junked Trotskyism and taken increasingly revisionist positions.

The RIL has consistently argued for an independent, working class, political-revolutionary line against all the forces of capitalist restoration in the degenerated and deformed workers' states, from the upheavals of 1999, through German reunification, the crises in the Baltic and the Caucasus, the August coup and the break-up of the Soviet Union, to the wars in the former Yugoslavia. At every stage we have had to fight and expose the dangerous, reactionary direction taken by the LRCI.

The conflicts over these positions have been the main focus of opposition inside the LRCI. "We regard the opposition to the leadership over the questions of Lithuania, the August coup, and the civil war in Bosnia as an attempt to defend Trotskyism within the LRCI and in general share the criticisms of the Latin American comrades and the New Zealand faction. These events have shown very clearly that Workers Power has not completely broken from a Cliffite view of the Soviet Union and the east European states, despite its rejection of Cliff's state capitalist characterisation of their economic systems. On this area, more than on anything else, its politics reflects the pressures of middle class 'liberal' public opinion.

The first sign of these problems was clear back in 1989. Though the LRCI produced a generally correct analysis of the significance and content of the Gorbachev 'reforms' during the second half of the 80s, WP's political analysis of the upheavals that swept eastern Europe in 1989 was seriously flawed. The RIL saw These upheavals were generally negative from the point of view of working class interests. They were pro-bourgeois democratic movements, looking to 'the west' and testing out how far they could go against the bureaucracy in this direction under the changed conditions of Gorbachev's accommodation with the imperialist powers. As they became bolder, more openly pro-capitalist forces came to the fore, replacing the more cautious bureaucratic reformists, but the overall direction of these mass movements was established from the beginning, and the working class hardly ever played any independent role.

The LRCI on the other hand saw the upheavals in a far more positive light, as originally moving towards a political revolutionary situation, despite the lack of evidence of any struggle by the working class for its own interests. (Only Romania, from December 1989 through 1990, was a partial exception). Later the LRCI had to change its assessment of these movements but of course it was not a change of policy by the LRCI, it was the movements that had changed their character like the Iran-Iraq war previously! Quite how 'political revolutionary' developments in the working class had been reversed by pro-bourgeois movements they were never able to explain.

This serious misreading of the situation indicated the roots of the problem that has become deeper and deeper over the past five years. It was not that the LRCI leadership mistook a crossclass movement supporting bourgeois democracy, pushing for the restoration of a capitalist market economy, for a working class movement fighting for proletarian democracy against the privileged bureaucracy. There have been situations where strong elements of both tendencies are combined for a time, in the events of May and June 1989 in China for instance, but that was not the case in the eastern European events. Essentially The LRCI described these events as positive, political-revolutionary developments because the Workers Power leaders saw bourgeois democracy as progressive in the degenerated and deformed workers states.

The evolution of the LRCI's positions over the subsequent five years bear out the accuracy of this judgement, and of our judgement that the roots of their crisis lie in their incomplete break with Cliffism. Indeed they are rapidly following down the path beaten by Socialist Organiser back to their ideological roots.

The following year the tendency became clearer still as a result of German 'reunification', the capitalist takeover of East Germany and the developing crisis in the Baltic republics of the Soviet Union. While avoiding the capitulation of much of the left in the face of the headlong collapse of East Germany, The LRCI's opposition to the process was notably ambiguous, declaring themselves against the "Undemocratic reunification". The danger of slogans like this should be clear. Democracy is a form of state rule and cannot be neutral in class terms. This slogan left open the question of whose democracy, the bourgeoisie's or the workers'? And of course reunification was 'democratic', in the bourgeois democratic sense; it was based on the results of bourgeois democratic elections in East Germany.

The capitulation to bourgeois democratic and bourgeois nationalist forces in eastern Europe came out fully as a result of the crisis in the Baltic republics, which led to the LRCI for the first, but not the last time, taking an outright counterrevolutionary position with respect to the Baltic Republics. In the course of 1990 openly pro-capitalist nationalist movements had come to power in the three Baltic soviet republics, and in March 1990 the Lithuanian government declared its independence from the Soviet Union. In the context of the overall negative development of the crisis of Stalinism, without any significant independent movement of the working class, and because of the real history of national oppression by the Soviet bureaucracy, these movements did have broad popular support. They were nevertheless counter-revolutionary movements which were in effect the cutting edge of the accelerating movement towards the breakup of the Soviet Union by the forces of capitalist restoration.

That is why the RIL opposed supporting or defending these governments. We argued for a programme of independent working class action, with workers' control of industry to defend collectivised property from the restorationists, and workers' defence guards. We supported the right of workers to establish independent socialist republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and argued for such republics to form a socialist federation of the Baltic. We did not call for Soviet

troops to put down the Baltic regimes, and opposed the operations of the Soviet interior Ministry troops in the Baltic and their attack on the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, in January 1991. But socialists could not support the mobilisation against them by the reactionary government of President Landsbergis, that could only mean supporting the liquidation of the working class into a pro-bourgeois movement as a preparation for capitalist restoration. This should have been clear as crystal to Trotskyists but it was inconceivable to the leaders of Workers' Power, who could only keep repeating, "whose side are you on?"

In May 1990 Workers Power, under the headline "Hands off Lithuania", argued that, socialists should "Demand that the British government recognises Lithuania and supplies goods if requested by Lithuania without conditions". They made it clear in the article that this absolutely included arms. So they had decided whose side they were on. They could only see a struggle between the forces of bourgeois democracy and the forces of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and in their view the former represented progress and had to be supported. If you did not make the same decision you were vilified and misrepresented as supporters of Stalinist repression.

If we compare the positions of the LRCI on Lithuania and Azerbaijan, it becomes clear just how much their views have been influenced by western bourgeois public opinion. The RIL never, at any point, called for Soviet troops to invade Lithuania and crush the pro bourgeois nationalist movement. However, the LRCI did support the occupation of Azerbaijan by Soviet troops in 1990 which the ITC opposed.

Workers Power argued that it was necessary to stop the massacre of the Armenians, but the attacks had stopped before the troops went in. The real purpose was to crush the Azerbaijan national movement a movement that was less aggressively pro-imperialist than the Lithuanian government, and which was much less of a threat to the Soviet borders at that time. The difference was that whilst the western media backed European Lithuania to the hilt, it presented the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in totally pro-Armenian terms, which had a strong undertone of racism (Christian Armenians persecuted by Muslim, Asiatic Azeris).

#### Workers Power's support for Yeltsin and counter-revolution in the former Soviet Union

After all this, it came as no big surprise when the LRCI capitulated to 'democratic' and imperialist pressures and backed the counter-revolutionary Yeltsin in the 1991 August coup in the former Soviet Union. The RIL took a principled Trotskyist stand on this question was to see the refusal of the great mass of the Soviet working class to respond to calls for the defence of Yeltsin's 'democracy' as essentially positive, though passive. The workers were certainly hostile to the coup, but did not see Yeltsin as offering any alternative that they were prepared to fight for. Trotskyists needed to turn this passive hostility to both wings of the restorationist bureaucracy into an active independent mobilisation of the working class.

That is why we argued that those groups in the Soviet Union who identified with Trotskyism should have called for workers' councils to take control of the factories etc., organise a workers militia, begin a campaign of fraternisation with the soldiers to set up rank-and-file committees in the army, and prepare for a political revolution against both wings of the bureaucracy.

We opposed support for Yeltsin's ineffective, and later rescinded, 'general strike' decree because this would subordinate the working class to the most open pro-bourgeois wing of the bureaucracy. We were against defending the Russian Parliament the Moscow 'White House' because this had nothing to do with democratic rights for workers. It was a bourgeois democratic institution which was a focus for capitalist restoration in a degenerated workers' state.

Again, when it came down to it Workers Power were unable to fight for the independence of the

working class, or see the connection between that and the defence of collectivised property. They could not think about the crisis in class terms at all. All they could see was a choice between bourgeois democracy and Stalinist repression. So in the words of one of their leading 'theoreticians', they "Stood arm-and-arm with Boris Yeltsin". Of course, we can rest assured that. It was Boris's left arm Workers Power was linking with! And they would probably have held a red flag in their free hand too! They do have principles after all.

### The Bosnian War

But it was over the long drawn-out civil wars in the former Yugoslavia - where the pressures of bourgeois opinion have been strongest - that the full extent of Workers Power's retreat from Trotskyism has become apparent. precipitating the LRCI's latest splits. The RIL has written on and debated the Yugoslav crisis extensively over the past four years. We has recognised that all the regional or 'national' capitalist-restorationist factions that have come to power in the republics of the former Yugoslav federation are trying to use ethnic divisions to carve out a base for themselves and establish their own privileged relationship with imperialism. The imperialists, insofar as they have acted together, are trying to exercise control over the whole region by establishing a balance of power between these factions. For these reasons the RIL has refused to give support to any of the governments, or to take a defencist position in relation to any of them in the course of the wars between them.

We have argued that the only answer to their reactionary nationalism, 'ethnic cleansing' and the destruction of the economy is to fight for independent and integrated workers' and peasants' defence guards is for integrated working class control of distribution; occupations of industries closed by the war, and links between workers' organisations in the different republics to build action against the war efforts of all the governments and to prepare a workers' plan for the reconstruction of the economy on the basis of collectively owned property, take back the factories stolen by privatisation.

At different times Workers Power, too, has said many of these things, but they have only been irrelevant decorations to their articles, like taking a red flag to the defence of the White House. They are not a programme for action now, only propaganda statements of what would be nice under ideal circumstances. they are flatly contradicted by the main line of Workers Power's arguments, the immediate choices they have actually made, which have always {except very briefly at the very start of the conflict in Bosnia that has been for the defence of the procapitalist, pro- imperialist governments against its rivals. First it was for Croatia against Serbia, then for the Bosnian government against the Bosnian Serbs. Trotskyists support independent working class self-defence, but of anyone to defend themselves against genocide and the working class, given that it is organised and/acting as an independent force, can make tactical military arrangements with any forces to stop ethnic cleansing. this is a far cry from the LRCI's position of defend the Croatian or Bosnian governments.

This position has got the LRCI leadership into a series of hopeless tangles and convoluted arguments, as their positions have zigzagged in response to the shifting circumstances of the Bosnian war.

One feature of WP's positions has become steadily more pronounced: The adaptation to the feeling among sections of liberal western opinion that 'our' governments must 'do something' - a sentiment that plays directly into the hands of imperialism. So now we have the ludicrous position of the LRCI trying to sound revolutionary, and calling for the UN and NATO out of the Balkans and condemning the bombing, while at the same time demanding that 'our' government sends arms to the Bosnian forces and opens the borders to (Islamic) 'volunteers' going to fight with them. In other words Workers Power does not want the imperialists to fight in the Balkans;

they just want them to get their clients and proxies to do the fighting! No wonder that this reactionary nonsense has blown the LRCI apart and exposed it as an unprincipled bloc.

### The struggle for consistent Trotskyism

In 1991, in the one and only public debate between Workers Power and the RIL, on the crisis of Stalinism, we used Trotsky's phrase "From a scratch to a danger of gangrene" to describe the evolution of Workers Powers politics on this question. It is clear now that the gangrene has gripped the whole body.

The ITC supports those comrades who have recognised the disease and are trying to save something healthy. But if they are to move forward they must recognise the real roots and course of the disease in the overall sectarian, centrist method of Workers Power which was written into the foundations of the LRCI.

This is the case, too, with the bureaucratic internal regime of the LRCI! and with the methods of slander and character assassination which the leaders are resorting to. These things are not new. It is the habit of Workers Power, when anyone splits from them and criticises their rightward trajectory to divert attention from political questions by launching public campaigns 'I over property or financial disputes or alleged breaches of discipline.

This was precisely what they did when Chris Brind left Workers Power, seeking to divert attention from the political criticisms over lesbian and gay work, and whip their members into a sense of moral outrage, with a campaign about the ownership of a computer (while putting every possible obstacle in the way of a solution). Similarly when Steve Masterson fought their backsliding during the war against Iraq they sought to isolate him by concentrating on issues of discipline.

It appears that history is now repeating itself again, with the Public campaign against Jose Villa. This bureaucratic behaviour on the national and international levels has political roots. It is the behaviour of a clique of intellectuals in control of rightward moving centrist sect. As their accumulating political shifts and misjudgements makes their leadership more and more vulnerable they can only defend themselves by bureaucratic demands for loyalty and claims to moral superiority. Unprincipled blocs lead to unprincipled politics, which lead to an unprincipled regime.

We appeal to every serious comrade in and around Workers Power to reflect on the lessons of the splits in the LRCI, and think carefully about where their leadership is taking them. We appeal to them to examine and discuss the politics method and work of the ITC, of the RIL in Britain the AKP in Germany and the RWL in the USA, and compare them with the record and work of Workers Power and the LRCI.

We are not delivering ultimatums. We are serious about the need for revolutionary leadership, and do not believe that it will be by endless discussion circles and journals of debate that lead nowhere. It will only be built if Trotskyists establish a real fighting organisation that is giving leadership new in the struggles of the most militant workers and youth, but on that basis we are more than ready to discuss and work patiently with any comrades who share that goal and are rejecting the revisionism of Workers Power.

We make exactly the same appeal internationally to the comrades who now find themselves outside the LRCI. It is clear that the Latin American and to some extent the Zealand comrades have very important areas of agreement with the ITC. We have set these out in this statement, at least in outline. Moreover their opposition was not just to a set of positions but to the damaging effect of the passive political method of Workers Power on the work in their own class struggles (the notion that the Bolivian workers had suffered an historic strategic defeat, for instance).

We recognise that all these comrades have taken internationalism seriously. We appeal to them to discuss the perspectives of the ITC and examine the work of our sections as we will do with theirs.

We hope they will agree with us that there is no way forward without the construction of an international tendency of consistent Trotskyists, which is fighting for revolutionary leadership in real struggles and not just serving as an international literary centre, and which therefore must be based on a shared strategy and analysis reached by clear and honest clarification.

And we hope that all those left inside the LRCI who desire such a tendency break from its opportunist politics before it is too late, and join with us in the struggle for a real Trotskyist international organisation.

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#### NOTES

[1] Centrism is a political method that swings between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary reformist positions and practice. For instance, Militant Labour in Britain has engaged in practical work against police which has a revolutionary character whilst having a reformist strategy of demanding 'police accountability', as oppose to smashing the state. The SWP, on the other hand, talks of 'revolution' and 'smashing the state' but its practice on every demonstration is to ensure there is no organised defence or resistance to the police whatsoever. In both cases these groups display themselves as neither reformist for counter-revolutionary through and through, or consistently revolutionary, rather they, like most of the groups that claim to be Trotskyist, are centrists.

[2] The Trotskyist Manifesto', the international programme of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International first published in 1989.

[3] USFI, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, until recently led by Earnest Mandel and the largest

Trotskyist-centrist international group. Socialist Organiser, now known as the Alliance for Workers Liberty and

sometimes operating under New Left or Labour Left Briefing labels a middle-class British centrist sect. Both

organisations have seen the 'democratic' struggle as more important than the defence of workers' collectivised

property in the former Soviet Union. Both groups ignored the class question, both groups hailed the counterrevolution in East Germany as 'progressive people's democratic uprisings'.

[4] The Trotskyist Manifesto, p19